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**To:** michaelstroud@bellsouth.net;  
**Date:** Thu, May 2, 2013 2:51:27 PM  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** 2013 Annual Meeting information and Welcome to new churches of the SEC!

Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. Don't forget to add tdowns@secucc.org to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

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## FEATURE FOCUS



### Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting for the Southeast Conference will be a packed event this year with keynote presentation by UCC General Minister and President Rev. Geoffrey Black, a time to celebrate the ministry of our Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Tim Downs, and words from Rev. Kathy Clark, in addition to worship leadership from Rev. Joyce Hollyday, Minister Dorinda Broadnax, and Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews.

[Click here for detailed bios of the speakers and worship leaders for the Annual Meeting.](#)

Members in Discernment are encouraged to attend the Annual Meeting and will have the opportunity to meet in a workshop with Rev. Geoffrey Black on Friday, June 14th. MIDs will also have a subsidized registration rate.

Online registration will be available via the SECUCC website starting on Wednesday of next week. Look for an email with a direct link to the registration page. The cost of registration for the entire event will

be \$75.

### Youth Gathering and "Lock-in" during Annual Meeting

We're excited to announce that this year we'll add a youth gathering to our Annual Meeting! The sleepover gathering will feature relevant youth workshops, a chance to meet and connect in a workshop with Rev. Geoffrey Black, and contemporary/emergent worship featuring music with the Praxis band. Online registration information will go out with the adult registration for the Annual Meeting. Part of youth registration will be subsidized by the Conference. Cost for youth attending will be \$40 and will include all meals and activities.



### Tap Banquet and Commencement

The final TAP Banquet will take place on Thursday evening, June 13th at 6 pm. Following the banquet will be a service of commencement and worship at 7:30pm. Rev. Kathy Clark will be guest speaking as we put a capstone on this vibrant ministry as it transitions into the PATHWAYS program. Look for registration information to be emailed with the Annual Meeting materials.



Please join us in praying for **Rev. Roger Knight, our former SEC Conference Minister** who is recovering from a recent heart procedure. Roger is a member of Pleasant Hill Community Church.

### MISSION 4/1 EARTH:

*50 Great Days*

**Kirkwood, UCC** was featured in the National UCC news for their partnerships with the community around Mission 4/1 Earth. They've connected with many different community organizations to plant trees and raise awareness around the environment, and have sponsored several events including a community screening of *The Lorax*, and a blessing of cyclists in the community. [You can read more on the National UCC website here.](#)

## AROUND the CONFERENCE

### News from Our Local Churches



**The Southeast Conference welcomes into full membership in the United Church of Christ the following congregations:**

**RIM (Restoration Inclusive Ministries) International, of Decatur, GA.** Their pastor, Sonya Williams, led them into the UCC as a congregation with ties to The Fellowship, a national ONA predominantly African-American coalition of congregations lead by the bishop Yvette Flunder. Describing themselves as a church "for the Whosoever" they are proud to join with the call of the UCC that "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcomed..."

**Open Table Community of Faith, Mobile, AL,** led by their pastor Ellen Sims. Open Table began its life four years ago as a new church start in the UCC, and worships at about 50 members. They welcome a diverse gathering into their membership and have become social justice leaders in Mobile.

**Covenant Community Church, in Center Point, AL,** led by Pastor JR Finney. Covenant is located in a suburb of Birmingham, and is a congregation worshipping at 250. They have an active outreach to the LGBT people of Birmingham, and a creative online ministry, which reaches around the globe. The church mission fits closely with the extravagant welcome of the UCC, describing themselves as "an inclusive community of faith - Offering Hope, Showing Faithfulness, and Sharing Joy."

**Phoenix Christian Church, of Wildersville, TN,** is a small congregation located over an hour west of Nashville, which is proudly inclusive. They are currently served by a rotation of ministers from Holy Trinity Community UCC, Nashville.

**The Southeast Conference Board of Directors voted at its meeting on April 20th to authorize a new church start, Praxis UCC, in Americus, GA, and to call Kirk Lyman-Barner as their pastor.** Those who are seeking to form this new church are meeting in Kirk and his wife Cory's living room in a gathering over a dozen people. Together they are seeking to establish a presence of welcoming and integrated Christianity in Americus.



**Praxis, UCC in Atlanta** participated in native grass planting to create sustainable meadow along the Beltline - light rail and walking trails that are being developed to increase transportation and health around the city of Atlanta. They partnered with Journey Shelter bringing some of the men there for a day of earth care and sharing in the community.

How is your church doing in the UCC Mission 4/1 Earth initiative? Tell us your stories and send us pictures for our next issue of Conference Connections!

## CONFERENCE NEWS

### News from the Conference and Associations

The Conference Board of Directors at its meeting on April 20th took the following actions:

- Reviewed the budget for 2013 that will be recommended to the annual meeting of the conference, and noted that they have approved it with the hope that additional money will be raised to address the projected deficit.
- Approved the release of the money in the Elizabeth Talmage Scholarship Fund to the St. John's River College in Florida to continue the scholarship in that school.
- Approved the report of the nominating committee to the annual meeting of the conference which reflects the changes to the bylaws of the conference and reduces the size of the Board from twenty-eight to twenty members.
- Reviewed the progress of the Commission on Ministry and its committee structure, and commended them for their excellent work in a challenging undertaking.
- Received with appreciation a report from the team that attended the Southern Region of the UCC meeting to explore collaboration among the four conferences of the Southern Region, which are Southern, Southeast, Florida, and South Central. They agreed to begin to organize a regional website for the conferences.

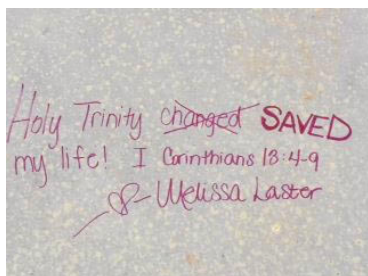
The Board has called **Leah Lyman-Waldron to serve as co-pastor of Praxis UCC, Atlanta** with her husband Chris, who is currently pastor, as Chris assumes additional responsibilities as the Director of Communications for the Southeast Conference. Praxis is continuing to find creative ways to extend welcome and service in the community and gathers for emergent style worship at Central Congregational Church in Atlanta.

The board of directors has also approved turning the mortgage on worship space for **Unity UCC Montgomery** over to the congregation now that they have the financial stability to assume their own financing. Our congratulations to the church for this important step in their ministry!



#### Update on construction at Holy Trinity in Nashville

The construction of the new sanctuary for Holy Trinity is coming along beautifully.



These pictures are from Sunday, April 14, 2013, when the

## Generosity Corner

**Transform Your Life-Transform the World  
Here's How...Apply Now**



### The Campaign

Transforming Churches-Transforming Lives, the Conference's Capital Campaign pledged total now is \$621,700. The Campaign's Priorities Committee is busy sending our new communications about the Campaign and developing the processes and procedures for investing the money in our churches. Please contact Debbie Spearman, Generosity Coordinator, if you would like to discuss a program or initiative from your church that needs funding.

### Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM)

Church pledges for OCWM Basic support are due back to Debbie in the office as soon as possible. [Click here to download a pledge card.](#) What is OCWM? It stands for Our Church's Wider Mission and it funds the work we do in the Conference, in the national and global church. Challenge your church to be a Covenant Keeper (Tithe 10% to OCWM) or a Strive to Tithe church (increase your OCWM by 1% every year until you reach a tithe).

Need an OCWM speaker for a church program? Need some brochures or other OCWM materials? Please contact [Debbie Spearman at dspearman@secucc.org](mailto:dspearman@secucc.org).

## A Word from TIM DOWNS

Dear Friends,

At our recent Board of Directors meeting we took time as we do at each meeting for prayer and reflection together. I began with a simple exercise using the strategies of Appreciative Inquiry to invite us to tell stories around a question: "when in my life in this Conference have I felt most alive?" Once we shared our stories, we asked "how do these stories





congregation was invited to walk on the foundation, pray prayers of thanksgiving and blessing, and write their thoughts on the new surface. The congregation is planning for opening worship in the new space this coming October.

## CELEBRATION

### Invitations to celebrations around the Conference

#### Celebration of Full Standing for Open Table in Mobile

Rev. Ellen Sims, and the Open Table Community of Faith, in Mobile, Alabama invite you to a service of celebrating of their reception as a church in full standing in the United Church of Christ which will be held on Sunday May 5th, at 5:00pm. The invitation can be downloaded [here](#).

If you are unable to attend the service you are encouraged to send messages of greetings and welcome to the pastor, which will be shared at the service. [She can be emailed here.](#)

#### Celebration of Reception into the UCC for Covenant Community Church

The Rev JR Finney and Covenant Community Church invites all to attend a service of reception into the United Church of Christ on **May 19th at 11 am**, which will be followed by a picnic with all area Birmingham UCC churches.

**Congratulations to Samantha Clark** who's Ordination into Ministry in the United Church of Christ, will occur at **5:00 pm on May 19th** at Kirkwood United Church of Christ, Atlanta, GA. All are invited to attend.

All are invited to the ordination of **Leah Lyman Waldron and Kirk Lyman-Barner on Sunday, June 2nd at 5:30 pm** at Praxis UCC, which meets at Central Congregational Church in Atlanta. We'll be celebrating their ordination as well as the expansion of the Praxis family.

On Friday, April 26th The first of many **Meet-Up events** geared towards creating greater community among and between the churches of the conference took place at Sweetwater Brewery complete with Fox Brothers BBQ! Nancy Chorpensing of Praxis UCC and Jake Joseph a Candler School of Theology seminarian thought-up this radical idea of mixing community and beer a couple of months back. Members of Central

connect with each other, and how do they help us begin to map our way forward?" Here are some of the responses:

"I stood tall at General Synod in Atlanta in 2005 when we voted for marriage equality. John Thomas' prayer at the end of that vote reminded me of who we in the UCC are."

"When I went with a work crew from my church to respond to Katrina, and saw all these people from across the UCC working together. That was church."

"I am excited each time we receive a new church into the UCC. We are growing and becoming stronger as people discover what we have known and loved for our whole lives, this United Church of Christ."

"When my church voted to be ONA, I was so very proud."

"The first TAP graduation, when I saw all these people who wanted to be in ministry welcomed."

"Considering the work that Dick Sales began, Kathy Clark continued, and Sarah Kim has picked up. PATHWAYS holds so much promise for so many!"

"Walking into a setting where the new Members in Discernment had gathered for a retreat and seeing two rooms full of people eager to prepare for ministry in the United Church of Christ."

Each of these stories says something about our ministry and how we have built this Conference and the United Church of Christ in the South. We appealed to our long tradition of prophetic witness, which extends back to the days of building schools and churches for the emancipated slaves after the Civil War, by reclaiming a spirit in this time of inclusiveness in our churches and ministries for same gender loving people. The other themes that emerged from these stories were those of empowering and equipping people for ministry, and our resolve to be a people of service. The next question to us, having looked at our past, and reflected on where we are in the present, is, "where do we go from here?" Our witness has been powerful through the years, and I am confident as each of you as a Conference begin to wrestle with your next steps, you will continue to be a powerful witness. It is, after all who God has called you to be.

Peace,

Tim Downs



[Forward this issue](#)

UCC, Praxis UCC, and Church of the Savior UCC in attendance enjoyed meeting each other in a relaxed and fun environment. **Keep an eye out for the next Meet-up event to take place in late Summer/early Fall.**

Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ



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